ventnorensis

journal of the ventnor botanic garden friends' society

'It is said that when the first flower of the Campbell's Magnolia *campbellii x alba* opens in late winter, spirits begin to lift'

– John Curtis, CIC Director

Volume 21 No. 1 Spring 2014

spring/summer opening times

10am till dusk daily
For opening times for Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk

exhibitions/events

March
Friday 7th - Design Walk, 12 midday
Sunday 9th - Isle of Wight Wedding Fayre, 11am to 3pm
Saturday 15th - Irish Lunch, TBC
Thursday 20th - VBG Lecture Series: The Dance of Air and Sea: How Oceans, Weather and Life Link Together, 7pm
Sunday 23rd - Sunday Lunch at VBG, 12.30pm-2pm
Sunday 30th March - Mother's Day Lunch, 12.30pm-2pm

April
Friday 4th - Design Walk, 12 midday
Saturday 5th and every Saturday until 25th October - Ghost Walks with Marc Tuckey, 8pm
Friday 18th to Monday 21st - Spring Plant Sale Saturday, 11am to 3pm
19th - Alice and The Mad Hatter's Tea Party, 3pm
24th - 7pm VBG Friends' Society AGM

May
Friday 2nd - Design Walk, 12 midday
Friday 2nd - Down to Earth with Monty Don at the Isle of Arts Festival - VIP Tickets, 5.45pm
Sunday 25th - VBG Garden Party, TBC
Wednesday 28th - Donation Day, 10am to 5pm

June
Friday 6th - Design Walk, 12 midday
Friday 13th - Fundraising evening in aid of the St. John's Ambulance Service at VBG, TBC
Sunday 15th - Father's Day Picnic, , TBC
Saturday 21st June - VBG All Day Birthday (free cake with admission), 10am to 5pm

July
Friday 4th - Design Walk, 12 midday
Saturday 5th to Sunday 27th - Open Gardens 2014 in association with the Red Cross, 10am to 5pm each day
Sunday 6th - Songbirds Choir perform in edulis, 10.30am to 11.30am

August
Friday 1st - Design Walk, 12 midday
Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd - Air Ambulance, TBC
Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th - The Healing Festival, 10am to 5pm
Monday 11th - Quantum Theatre perform Alice Through the Looking Glass and The Tempest, 2.30pm and 7pm
Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th - Air Ambulance at VBG, TBC
Saturday 30th - IW Railway 150th Celebrations and Vintage Day at VBG, TBC

Campbell's Magnolia campbellii x alba. Photograph by Julian Winslow

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Curator's Notes

No baggage

Much has been said before, both in Ventnorensis and elsewhere, about the remarkable microclimate of the Undercliff and its effect in enabling this extraordinary Garden to thrive. This microclimate, or environment, is one of three factors influencing the success (or otherwise) of any garden, the others being the genetic resource held within the plants themselves and the action of the gardener or horticulturist. Examples of where each has the uppermost influence could be the tropical display house, where environment is crucial; forestry monoculture, where the genes of the plant make the largest contribution to the scene; and the topiary garden, where the applied horticultural input makes the biggest contribution to the final landscape.

Photograph by Julian Winslow

Of course, each of these three factors are themselves limited within various settings, and all manner of other rules come into play. These could be as simple as the whims of a garden owner, or multitude regulations from a governing body. Recently I was at a garden (which will remain nameless) widely held as the greatest example of its kind, a "world class" garden, as claimed by its stewards. The direction of that garden is as set in stone as the rules of chess: history is its overarching governor. A horticultural Gormenghast. Working there, I was told, was like copying Picasso. Hmmm.

At this point I reflected on the beautiful freedom we have enjoyed at Ventnor Botanic Garden for so many years. We've been unhindered by the baggage of history and heritage, whose locks, chains and strongboxes confine many a garden like the misdeeds that manacled Dickens's Joseph Marley in eternity. Sure, we have some old stuff, but it never held us back from becoming a future garden in the present, looking for what's next. Trying to make history rather than repeat it.

The irony of the garden I referred to above is that when it was created, its visionary owner/curator/gardener was at the very forefront of garden design, in many ways turning gardening on its head whilst bringing new plants into cultivation in a style that was revolutionary and, ultimately, copied to death. Your own garden will very likely have its echoes within. Were this visionary alive today, I wonder if he would like the preservation of their achievement, or whether he would want to drive it onward into uncharted territory.

I wonder how we would judge the Ventnor Botanic Garden of the future. In eighty years' time will what we have created be guarded as historic, or will our successors be looking for the next new direction?

Chris Kidd, Curator

Annual General Meeting 2014

The Annual General Meeting of the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society will be held on Thursday 24th April at 7pm in the Visitor Centre, Ventnor Botanic Garden. John Curtis, Director of the Ventnor Botanic Garden CIC, will give a talk on Taking on a Garden.

Gardening volunteers

meet every Wednesday morning, at the far end of the car park. Bring hand tools and a drink to have at coffee break.

Renew Now!

Just a gentle reminder that **Membership Renewal** was due on 1st January. If you have forgotten please look out your membership form in the centre pages, *Ventnorensis* or download and print a form from our website where you will be reminded of the fees

http://ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk/index.php/membership/join-us/

How about setting up a Standing Order? See membership form.

Walk the talk

Design Walks happen on the first Wednesday of every month. Meet at the Visitor Centre at noon to learn about a new aspect of the Garden and to share your own ideas on how it should develop.

Data protection

Our mail-out labels are printed electronically with a computer. This means that we are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Provided all our members agree to their names and addresses being placed on an electronic database it will not be necessary for us to register the list, thus saving us money.

The Executive Committee undertakes not to let the list be used for any purpose other than for promoting the activities of the Friends' Society. If, in spite of this undertaking, any member objects to his or her name being electronically recorded, please inform the Secretary.

Chairman's message

Spread the GOOD gossip

A recent edition of *Wildlife* magazine tells us that in Norse mythology, Ratatoskr is a red squirrel who runs up and down the world tree, Yaggdrasill, carrying messages and gossip. At VBG and on the Isle of Wight red squirrels hold special significance: there may be a link between this little chap and the phrase 'to rat on someone.'

Gossip has many guises. For some time now the news website "OnTheWight" has been running strings of blogs concerning VBG. After three entries attributed to separate 'current members of staff' at the Garden, the latest string was suspended pending investigation of deception (use of false names). The fact that it was not taken down immediately and that a number of offensive entries remained does not reflect well on the website.

The repetition of one-sided anonymously posted material apparently targeting the Curtis family and Garden staff is odious and cowardly. The Curtis family can hardly be blamed for the IW Council's decision to lease off the Garden (the Council retains the freehold and certain responsibilities including insurance) and the Garden, like our planet, must now be (self-) sustainable.

Resentment can lead to carping, so let's be positive. A working party heading up a 2014 campaign "VBG Landmarks Speak for Themselves" – to advise on public interface and marketing, and led by Richard Smith and David Kelley, is certainly a step in the right direction.

Let me give you some good gossip:

As part of the VBG Lecture series, our local Professor of Ecology and Evolution at Portsmouth University, Scott Armbruster, gave us a remarkable "Christmas Special" about the boxing-type antics of Stylidium (trigger plant) flowers which actually make bees flinch and have evolved rapidly by selecting slightly different target areas to hit! Watch out for more on this important pollination research.

Friends and volunteers gave Scott and his wife Mary a warm welcome in the Plantation Café and in November our Botany Club were privileged to meet the rest of the Plant Sciences Team (Page 26). Rocio (pronounced Rosea) and Mat describe their fascinating research on PP20 and 24 respectively. Our friendship and collaboration gives a fantastic boost to our embryonic programme of Education at the Garden.

We are delighted, too, to acknowledge the return of two trusty friends of the Garden. Celia Lowe collaborated in writing a most amusing "Children's Page" as "Aunty C" in Ventnorensis in 2003. She is now a lecturer at the IoW College, and with her director, Rob Mew, who received a "VBG prize" early in his career

and also a "Harold Hillier" Award in 1995, has agreed to forge links with VBG (see Page 28).

Finally a special tribute to Joy Munro (see Education, Page 23). In just a few short months since she was recruited at Wolverton Manor Garden Fair, Joy has distinguished herself in producing a marketable Schools and Families Programme.

Enjoy the spring, now announced by the flowering of the magnificent Magnolia *campbellii* and the Garden's awakening. I would welcome initiatives from Friends to sponsor and take active part in educational or fund-raising events this year. This is a call to action and allegiance, so spread good gossip, and keep in touch.

Chris Kershaw, Chairman

Phil Le May adds: OnTheWight says the CIC has "raided" the Friends' funds for non botanical services. I would like to put the record straight.

The Friends, a registered charity which has run successfully for over 20 years, has like any other charity a constitution to which it must adhere. Each year a report plus the accounts are sent to the Charity Commission, and given to all members and accepted at the AGM. Spending has always primarily been on plants and more recently on public education as well. This has not changed from the time the CIC came into being except more has been spent whilst we improve the botanical experience of the visitors. We have recently funded the following, in conjunction with funds from the CIC.

The new Mediterranean Plaza; the Olive Grove extension (soon to be in productive with olives); a grant towards the AONB funding used by the Education Officer last year; a grant to subsidise transport for Island School education at VBG.

The CIC has not requested any funds for anything other than botanical or education supplies or services.

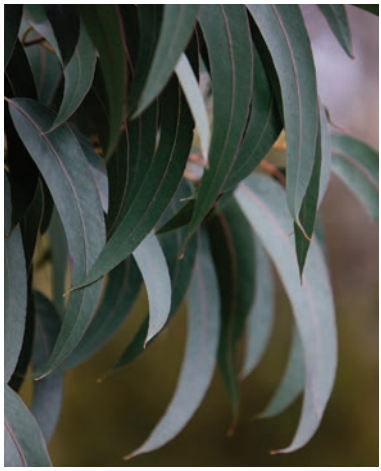
DISCOUNTS for members

The following suppliers have kindly agreed to give discounts to Friends' Society members. Please be aware that discounts and other benefits of VBGFS membership are subject to change. **Remember to take your membership card with you – a discount will only be given if you show it.**

Eddington House Nursery	Eddington Road, Nettlestone/Seaview: 10% discount
Deacons Nursery	Moor View, Godshill: 10% discount.

Avenues old and new

At an unrecorded date in history on this site, during the time of the Royal National Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest, were planted a considerable number of the Corsican Pine, *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio.* (Syn P. *nigra* subsp. *maritima.*) An unremarkable enough event at the time, but it was one which influenced this Garden's landscape for a century.



Tame monster: Eucalyptus E. cypellocarpa

The choice of the tree is interesting. Most *P. nigra* being planted at that time for ornamental purposes were *P. nigra* subsp. *nigra* of Austrian provenance, whereas the *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio,* as the common name suggests, is from Corsica and Southern Italy, including Sicily. It is therefore not as hardy, which may have been a factor as the hospital founders certainly reckoned on the remarkable microclimate of the site, but is also recognised as suitable for coastal sites. Certainly notable specimens in Rylstone Gardens, Shanklin, originate from the same period and are in very coastal positions.

We have no records of how many were originally planted, but the numbers surviving through the 20th century were almost certainly halved by the Great Storm of 1987 and its follower, the storm of '90. At the time of writing there are 48 left, all of these being well into old age, if not in their twilight years. Each was fully surveyed for safety in 2001, and is reviewed annually and following storms.

Like many of the taller pine trees they reach a growth plateau above 16m, depending upon conditions, their annual vertical growth becoming greatly reduced in favour of few, high, slowly widening lateral branches, the better for cone production and hence seed distribution. The trees planted in any kind of structured plan are now on the northern side of the Garden on what would have been the north side of the hospital. They must have been avenue plantings, being alongside Undercliff Drive, though this is now incomplete probably due to removal when Undercliff Drive was raised in order to alleviate the steep turn into Steephill Court Road. The tallest tree in VBG, at 23m, is a Corsican Pine (10-0301) at the terminus of this avenue in our most north-western corner.

In 2001, after a long and documented discussion with Simon, the former Curator, it was decided to plant Eucalyptus at VBG. The idea was to investigate how many Eucalyptus were able to grow in our climate, despite the dire warnings and prognoses from everyone ranging from WJ Bean to Sir Harold Hillier.

During this phase of experimentation I selected two monster species, *E. globulus* and *E. cypellocarpa.* Both of these are capable of putting on 2m each year – indeed Bean gives a cautionary tale of an *E. globulus* in Jersey that grew 10 feet a year every year for ten years, then died at a size no saw could possibly cope with. He warns of the folly of planting such things for fear of dealing with the resulting dead behemoths. Bean hadn't reckoned with the benefit of known provenance though, and the selected species were gauged to be able to cope here, though *E. cypellocarpa* is still something of an unknown quantity in the UK. In NSW Australia it can attain 200 feet.

An *E. Cypellocarpa* in the Arid Garden has grown through the sparse pine branches to form a most interesting mix of pine layer and Eucalyptus exuberance

Planting of our new giants took place in July 2001, each planted direct from root trainers as seedlings no more than 10cm high. It is well proven that the failure of Eucalyptus is mostly due to poor rooting after being pot bound. The losses from this method were enormous, but the plan, now coming to fruition, has been fulfilled. Mimicking the unknown gardener from the 18th century, we planted a replacement for each of the Corsican Pines along the length of Undercliff Drive. Just as for over a century these pines dominated along the length of what was the hospital, now the car park, so these Eucalyptus look to do the same.

Several of these new trees have recently caught my eye as singular studies. The *E. globulus* at the entrance to the Garden is host to a rare truffle, *Hymenangium album,* formerly only known in the UK from Kew and Edinburgh. The most north-western *E. globulus* will very soon exceed the height of our tallest Corsican Pine nearby. Finally, an *E. cypellocarpa* planted in what would conventionally be considered far too close to the tree it is replacing in the Arid Garden has grown through the sparse pine branches to form a most interesting mix of pine layer and Eucalyptus exuberance.

It is an interesting observation that plantings from two eras now coincide. One from an unknown plan formed in recognition of the capabilities of the site, but somewhat cautious in retrospect. The other from a disguised plan, in full appreciation of the site, and somewhat audacious in forethought.

Chris Kidd, Curator

The wobbly line to nirvana

John Curtis is inspired by the wisdom of others in the botanic world, and by the beauty of our magnolias

Around the corner from the Botanist and the entrance to Kew Gardens is a small Victorian iron gate carrying a discrete bronze plaque that reads 'BGCI' - Botanic Gardens Conservation International. An intimate courtyard full of plants with botanic labels leads to a big old wooden door behind which is a warren of offices full of wall after wall of files – the accumulated wisdom at this special hub for botanic gardens around the world.

Up two landings is Sara Oldfield, Secretary General. I knew the conversation would be rich as BGCI has dedicated much of its recent effort to its Climate Change Information Centre. As Britain's Hottest Garden we have a few things to say about climate change and conserving plants. We introduced the Ventnor Method℠, our style of presenting plants in association with each other as they would be in the wild: our take on how biodiversity can be maintained. One day in the future that discussion will be seen as the starting point for one of our in situ conservation programmes. Thanks go to David Back for opening the door in that courtyard for VBG.

We discussed a concept for an iconic greenhouse without walls. Our model of sustainable plant conservation goes beyond mollycoddling plants from another climate in an energy and water intensive glasshouse

Vision is not a challenge at VBG. Day-to-day excellence is. We have had a month dominated by missing loo rolls, blow downs, and flare ups from local dissenters and their media. Saving a botanic garden is not easy. It is not a straight line from a declining, uncertain state to nirvana.

It is said that when the first flower of the Campbell's Magnolia, Magnolia *campbellii x alba,* opens in late winter spirits begin to lift. And so it was on the 7th of February when we stood in a circle on the Design Walk looking at those large white petals and learning about the history of tree magnolias collected in China. We ended the Design Walk with a chat about the beginnings of our long range plan and a concept for an iconic greenhouse without walls and glass roof sections perpendicular to the winter sun fitted together organically up the Arid Garden slope like fish scales. Our model of sustainable plant conservation goes beyond gardeners mollycoddling plants that belong in another climate in an energy and water intensive glasshouse.

We have spent 18 months working on basics, so it is now time to start looking up to the horizon. The development of Ventnor Botanic Garden will forever be driven by the unique microclimate that originally brought the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest to the site in the 1869, 145 years ago. We recognise as custodians of the site's heritage that we are also creating tomorrow's heritage today. For this reason we are translating the value of the microclimate to today's society in the same way that Arthur Hill Hassell, the Hospital founder, did in 1867 after he visited Ventnor due to illness – by connecting the micro climate to the issues of the times. That's why we went to compare notes with BGCI and the Curator at Chelsea Physic Garden. One could argue that where tuberculosis was the incurable illness of the Victorian era, stress and anxiety are the incurables today. Equally biodiversity, species loss, and environmental degradation have become pressing matters for society. This winter's storms have helped sound the alarm and better established the connection between warmer waters in the Pacific and more extreme weather in England.

Reaching for greater heights: an Aloe Kniphofia multiflora shows its fires in November

Our efforts to rejuvenate the Garden continue at a pace exhausting to some and uplifting to others. Signal Point has been restored and the old Smugglers Museum has been rebuilt. We even added a trap door down into the old hospital sub basements. One must never forget that we inherited these buildings in a totally derelict state. The "drive thru" botanic garden project on the north side of Undercliff Drive is underway [see Page 10], as is the design of a new layout for the Medicinal Garden that encourages slower, more meandering visits.

We are deeply grateful for the legacy gift that enabled the Medicinal Garden works and for those who have joined me in donating their resources and energies to the Garden.

Come see us this spring and give us the strength and encouragement to carry on.

Living billboard -
Our Drive-Thru Garden

Chris Kidd describes a radical idea to raise awareness of the Garden

Fries with that? Dr Mike Maunder pitches his Drive-Thru idea to Chris Kidd

In August 2012 VBG was visited by Dr Mike Maunder, and we are lucky that he has agreed to join the VBG Advisory Group. His impressive background includes being Executive Director of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Miami, USA; Director of Conservation at the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Hawaii, USA; Head of Conservation Projects Development Unit at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, UK; Chief Collection, Conservation & Education Officer Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort in Abu Dhabi, and currently Associate Dean of Florida International University.

On his visit we had lengthy discussions on the direction and operation of this Garden. Dr Maunder highlighted the need for annual development of the Botanic Garden in order to reinvent the offer to the visiting public. Whether they be new visitors or not, he stressed the importance of strengthening the customer base and encourage repeat visits: this is core to the survival of the Garden. A Visitor survey this summer taught us we have a surprising volume of "spontaneous" visitors who drive in having previously been unaware of the Garden.

As a result, we have looked at development ideas that are appropriate to our objective and our key strength as Britain's finest botanic collection of sub-tropical plants displayed out of doors.

For many years it has been desired to break into the land to the north of Undercliff Drive and expand the Botanic Garden onto the south facing slopes there. The objective is to display on this land the "greatest hits" of this Garden in a landscape and style appropriate to a visitor driving through the Undercliff. In other words, a display that can be viewed at 30mph.

Existing landform already favours our style of planting, so with some heavy landscaping we can make three distinctive views or vistas: arid, Med, and bush. To the Eastern end of the land and opposite our main entrance exists a natural rock promontory elevating 4m above the road surface that will be a prime location for Agaves, Aloes, Carpobrotus, and Lampranthus – in other words the classic spiky and stunningly coloured desert plants we specialise in on our Arid Bank. In the middle part of the land can be a vista relying on swathes of Agapanthus spp, Echium pininana and Verbascum olympicum characteristic of our Mediterranean Garden, which can be appreciated at speed. To the western end can be examples of the palms and mighty Eucalyptus which in time will dominate and overarch the Undercliff Drive itself.

This work will become the best advertisement the Garden could have and will appeal to customers and Friends both old and new. It is proposed this landscape is a landmark in this Garden's development.

The VBG Friend's Society has agreed a budget for the proposed works, most of which will be spent on plants. A long established plant importer that we have worked with extensively in the past has offered the opportunity for a significant discount on specimen palms if paid for in advance. We have taken advantage of this offer and pre-ordered 10 each of Washingtonia filifera, W. robusta and Jubaea chilensis. When we collect these palms in early spring we will also select large Agaves, Dasylirions, Puyas etc from stock.

At the time of writing (January 2014) we are still drowning in the wettest winter since 2000 and for reasons of safety and sensibility have not begun the heavy landscaping works, but plan to undertake these as soon as it stops raining . . .

The Sir Harold Hillier Award

Sir Harold Hillier was an internationally respected plantsman and also a major supporter of the development of our botanic garden.

This trophy is awarded annually to a person who is considered to have made significant contributions to horticulture on the Island. It was presented by the late Sir Harold Hillier some time ago.

Nominations are once again being sought either from individuals or from organisations.

Please return this form to the Ventnor Botanic Garden Visitor Centre marked Hillier Award no later than 30th April 2014.

Nomination for the Sir Harold Hillier Award 2014

I/We: .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

Propose (name of nominee): .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode: .....

Reason for Nomination: .....

.....

.....

.....

..... Continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Weather in the Garden

(September 2013 – mid February 2014)

Remember September? **Chris Watts** reflects on a remarkable period which started without fanfare

As I write this report, it is raining and the winds are gusting – now there's a surprise! In fact it has been doing this ever since mid-October, with the only respite coming in a four week spell over late November/early December. September, having given us the warmest day of 2013 on the 5th (27.1°C), ended up being a rather unremarkable month in contrast to what was to follow.

Gutsy gusts: the wind wins

So for nearly five months from October the weather was rarely out of the news, whether for its severity, its consequences or in discussing its causes. A rapid succession of deep low pressure systems meant little relief from the heavy and persistent rain and stormy winds which characterised this winter; the sole consolation was the temperature: mild throughout, no air frost as the lowest registered was plus 0.5°C on the 20th November.

If I had to pick out the three most memorable storms they would be that dubbed 'St. Jude', on October 27th (rain: 38mm); December 23rd (42mm, the wettest day of 2013); and February 14th (20mm). Scattered throughout were many instances of thunder and hail, notably a spectacular two hour thunderstorm on the evening of October 22nd (18mm of rain in 50 minutes), and Christmas Day was peppered with frequent hail showers. A crack of thunder also came, at near midnight on New Year's Eve!

Throughout the period, thankfully there was little damage in the Garden; the saddest loss was perhaps that of the euodia, which met its fate on December 23rd.

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Sun Hrs	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Rain Duration Hrs
Sept	*15.7*	*0.0(0)*	*122.8––*	*56.8––*	*14*	*30.3*
Oct	*14.6++*	*0.0(0)*	*90.5––*	*154.9++*	*16*	*61.1*
Nov	*8.7*	*0.0(0)*	*n/a*	*87.7*	*15*	*43.7*
Dec	*8.7++*	*0.0(0)*	*n/a*	*178.4++*	*17*	*88.8*
Year 2013	*11.1*	*76.5(6)*	*n/a*	*898.6++*	*128*	*529.8*
Jan 2014	*8.3++*	*0.0(0)*	*n/a*	*176.8++*	*24*	*83.5*

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 No sign: about average
++/–– : significantly above/below average
+/– : modestly above/below average

Dear members …

I've always thought the concept of a 'Drive-Thru Burger Bar' a ridiculous idea. You're hungry so pull into some insalubrious place in a car park, where you stop at the first window and order, the second and pay and the third where you're given a hot, oily bun leaking cheese and tomatoes on your lap. And then you're back on the road wondering how on earth you eat the thing while the steering wheel slides greasily through your hands.

Far better, have a visual feast. Chris Kidd introduces us to the VBG Drive-Thru Garden on Page 10.

This is a supreme example of VBG's amazingly creative thinking. Have a read through this issue and you will want to become more and more involved. The Botany Club, for example, has had its first 'awayday' and what a time they had! See Rosemary Stewart's report, Page 26.

There is so much going on at the Garden, and we have a lot to ask of you. First, you'll see on Page 16 that we want to know if you'd consider receiving this magazine online instead of in its current physical form. Inside the back page you'll see a report on the highly successful Volunteer Fair hosted here at the Garden – we still need more help – out of which we gained a fabulous Education Officer who in the blink of an eye (though it won't have felt like that to her) created a VBG programme for schools, while Chris Kershaw forged links with our guest writers on Pages 20 and 24.

We are also still appealing for you, please, to sponsor a section of cladding for the Temperate House – see the first one in place below. And talking of altruism, do you know anyone deserves to be nominated for the Harold Hillier Award? (Page 11).

Two more things: I'm after your memories (Page 22) and your secrets (Page 18). I've shared one of my favourite gardens with you – can you return the favour?

Enjoy this issue of Ventnorensis.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Deadline for contributions for Summer Issue: May 30th

Lovingly clad: But we need more …

Raising the Roof

The violent weather this winter has had terrible consequences for the Temperate House. The Polycarbonate cladding has been damaged, and desperately needs replacing. We have negotiated a good price for the replacement panels – just £70 each – and now we need your help to buy them.

Visit http://www.botanic.co.uk/news?id=64 to learn more and find out how you can help.

Membership Application*/Renewal form*

*Delete as appropriate

Please send to the Membership Secretary with your payment and/or the Standing Order Authority.

Title	First Name	Surname
Address		
		Postcode
E- Mail		
Telephone		
Name of Second Member at the same address		
Name of Junior Member/s (under 16) & date/s of birth		

Membership Rates with effect from 1st January 2013

The Membership year runs from 1st Jan to 31st December.

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior	Non UK
£15	£7	£2	£18

New Members joining after 1st July pay reduced rates:

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior	Non UK
£8	£4	£1	£10

GIFT MEMBERSHIP AVAILABLE

For details see our web site www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

Individual Membership	£
2nd Member at the same address	£
Junior Member/s	£
Non UK Member	£
Optional Donation	£
TOTAL	**£** _____

Signature Date

Membership Secretary: VBGFS Caroline Peel, Point Cottage, Beach Road, Bembridge PO35 5NQ.

giftaid it

By completing this Gift Aid declaration you enable Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to claim tax back from the Government at no cost to yourself.

I/We would like Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to reclaim tax on any eligible membership subscriptions or donations made by me/us until further notice.

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Reference to be quoted (to be completed by VBGFS)
This order cancels any existing order in favour of this Payee
Signature Date
NAME OF ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED
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Ventnorensis Survey

Dear Members

The cost of producing Ventnorensis represents a considerable chunk of your membership fee – over 50 per cent in fact – so the Friends' Executive has been considering the option of distributing the magazine online, instead of posting a physical copy.

We would still produce a physical copy of the magazine, and our proposal is that this would be available to buy in the VBG Shop (subject to negotiations with the CIC). Members would receive a discount on the cover price.

Members could still opt to receive the magazine by post if they chose but each one not posted would represent a considerable saving to the Society on stamps and envelopes.

If the magazine is read online, the drain on the Friends' budget will be considerably reduced. Additional funds will then be available for the Garden. Any increase in subscription rates could, in the medium term at least, be deferred.

For all these reasons, we are asking you to answer the following question:

Would you be prepared to receive Ventnorensis online?

Please return the form below, or fill it in on the Members area of the website. Or email me at rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com with the word Survey in the Subject box.

Many thanks.

Roz Whistance, Editor

Ventnorensis Survey

Name.....

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.....

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Tour Highlights: Auckland – Ayrlies Garden - Bay of Islands – Palmco Garden - Hamilton – Napier – Art Deco Garden Tour – Gwavas Garden & Homestead – Wellington – Tranz Alpine Train – Franz Josef Glacier Region – Queenstown – Private Gardens Tour – Milford Sound – Te Anau – Dunedin – Mt. Cook – Christchurch – Kate Sheppard House & Gardens. Departure Dates: 6th November, 2014* / 1st February, 2015* (*guaranteed departure dates). Prices from £5,329 per person (based on twin share). Book early and save £300 per couple.

Portugal's Gardens

9 Days, 15 Meals (8 Breakfasts, 3 Lunches, 4 Dinners)

Tour Highlights: St. Michael, Azores – Sete Citades – Ponta Delgada – Furnas Valley – Terra Nostra Park – Lisbon – Queluz Palace & Gardens – Sintra – Quinta da Regaleira Gardens – UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Jeronimo's Monastery – Tower of Belem. Departure Dates: 31st May, 2014* / 12th July, 2014 / 6th September, 2014* / 18th April, 2015 (*guaranteed departure dates). Prices from £1,999 per person (based on twin share).

***These holidays are operated by Adventures Unlimited Inc. trading under one of our trade name RHS Garden Holidays. We use the RHS Garden Holidays brand name under license from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Less known but lovely

If you love VBG you'll be captivated by Tremenheere – it could be Ventor's Cornish cousin. **Liz Norbury** meets the owner

Tremenheere is a spectacular garden which rises up through a woody path to spectacular views overlooking St Michael's Mount. Owner Neil Armstrong is a GP who bought it "as an antidote to my day job".

The land, part of the highly fertile and sheltered Golden Mile, was heavily overgrown. "I had to do a lot of hacking, burning and cutting. But the land had tremendous potential."

From the start it seemed to Dr Armstrong right to do an exotic, experimental planting scheme to reflect the different habitats. The shady areas are given over to tree and ground ferns, with leafy plants around the streams and pond predominantly from New Zealand and Chile. In the open areas, there are 40 different species of palm trees, succulents, South African restios, Mexican *dasylirion* and *Xanthorrhoea glauca* – a striking Australian tree with a big floppy top – with bulbs and sun-loving perennials. Bamboo, mostly from China and the Himalayas, has a restful, screening effect. Interspersed with all this is mature woodland – oak, beech, sweet chestnut and horse chestnut.

Fickle but elegant: ***Juania australis***

This winter tree ferns especially have put on substantial new growth. "*Cyathea medullaris* in particular is a thing of wonder, with a trunk growth of greater than a foot a year and now a crown that now spans 20 ft. The other cyatheas – *australis, dealbata, smithii* and *cooperi* are remarkably perky with a fresh green crown. It has been a pleasant surprise to find *C.brownii* and some even more left field experiments growing strongly."

Work is about to start on a new four-acre extension to the gardens. Primitive woodland and a loose grassy South African meadow will form main themes here. A minor triumph was to find a self sown seedling of *Xanthorrhoea glauca* - it has since been successfully transplanted to a prominent new site. Dr Armstong says he has never heard of grass trees reproducing in the open in the UK before.

Established palm trees (up to 40 species) all thoroughly enjoyed last summer's heat. There was particularly impressive growth from Brahea *edulis* and Phoenix theophrastii. "I am greatly excited by the emerging colony of *Parajubaea torallyii*. Mass planting of these doubtfully hardy plants may be considered anything from bold to foolish, but I am happy to take the risk. Another palm that I regularly find myself staring at in wonder and admiration is the fickle but very elegant *Juania australis* – a woodlander of poise and beauty which Cornwall can do well."

Outside room: camera obscura. Photograph by Charles Francis

Creating a sculpture garden with internationally important art works provides the focus that would usually be provided by a large house. "Sculptor James Turrell created a temporary structure to interact with the solar eclipse in 1999," explains Dr Armstrong, "and has created for Tremenheere two significant works: Tewlwolow Kernow (Twilight in Cornwall), a large granite structure with an inner chamber from which to view the sky, and Aqua Obscura, an underground camera obscura in a remodelled Victorian water tank. There is also a substantial work by David Nash called Black Mound, two works by the influential Japanese artist, Kishio Suga, and a camera obscura by a local artist, Billy Wynter."

Last year the installation of a new permanent work by the renowned English land artist Richard Long evoked responses ranging from derisory comments to excited praise.

A plant sales area, to open at the end of March, and a lovely restaurant, make the Tremenheere experience complete.

Tremenheere is between Ludgvan and Gulval. It is open for the NGS on September 15 and 16, and then daily, except over Christmas and in January. For details, call 07974 996089 or visit www.tremenheere.co.uk.

With thanks to Liz Norbury of Cornwall Today

Send your Shared Secret to rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com

The same but different

Darwin was fascinated to know why one species has different 'morphs'. Here, **Dr Rocio Pérez-Barrales,** of the School of Biological Sciences at Portsmouth University, describes her own research into the vital influence an insect's tongue has on a species

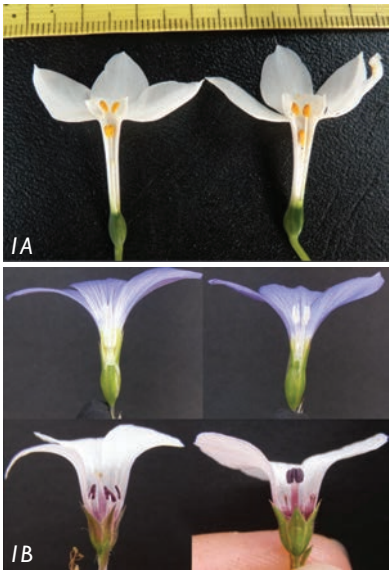
Darwin was fascinated by the beauty and great variation of flowering plants. As he said: "Flowers are not only delightful for their beauty and fragrance, but display most wonderous adaptations for various purposes."(1) His studies set the grounds for modern pollination ecology and reproductive biology in plants. He published several books on plants, and covered a wide range of topics such as pollination in British Orchids (some of which were studied on the Isle of Wight), carnivorous plants, the effect of self- and cross-fertilisation, and the domestication of plants (2-5).

One of his most influential works is *The Different Forms of Flowers on Plants of the Same Species* (6). Darwin was very puzzled by the fact that many plant species display two or three different morphs. This variation is called heterostyly and in its simple form occurs when flowers present two morphs with styles placed either above the anthers (long-styled flowers) or below the anthers (short-styled flowers). This way, the styles from long-styled flowers are placed at the same height as anthers in short-styled flowers, and styles from short-styled flowers are positioned at the same height as anthers in long-styled flowers (Figure 1).

Long-tongued nectarivorous insects, like butterflies and months, can transfer the pollen between different morphs, whereas short-tongued insects, like syrphid flies, only pollinate long-styled flowers

Darwin studied many heterostylous species, and he concluded that "heterostyled plants are adapted for reciprocal fertilisation; so that the two or three forms, though all are hermaphrodites, are related to one another almost like the males and females of ordinary unisexual animals". Darwin's ideas on heterostyly were expanded further during the 20th century (7). The most accepted theory to explain how heterostyly evolved was that of Lloyd and Webb (8,9). These authors developed a mathematical model to describe the conditions that would promote pollen movement between different morphs, under the condition that pollinators can place the pollen of different morphs on different parts of their body.

My research on Mediterranean daffodils *(Narcissus)* and flaxes *(Linum)*, has provided empirical support to this model. My work in Narcissus has shown that long-tongued nectarivorous insects, like butterflies and months, can transfer the pollen between long-styled and short-styled flowers, whereas short-tongued insects, like syrphid flies, only pollinate long-styled flowers (10, see Figure 1A). These different pollinators are not only associated with the presence of one or two morphs in natural population of *N. papyraceus,*



Heterostyly in Narcissus and Linum species from the the Iberian Peninsula. a) Long-styled flower (right) and short-style flower (left) of Narcissus papyraceus; b) Long-styled Pin flowers (left both up and down) and short-styled Thrum flowers (right both up and down) of blue Linum narbonense and white Linum suffruticosum. Pictures by Rocio Pérez-Barrales

they also correspond with changes at species levels: heterostylous species, like *N. albimarginatus*, are visited by long-tongued bees, and species with just one morph, as *N. watieri,* are visited by shyrphid flies (11).

The floral variation in *Linum* flowers has provided new insights to understand heterostyly. Heterostylous *Linum* species display variations in the shape of the flowers that increase the ability of insects to separate the pollen of the two morphs on different parts of their body (Figure 1B). Species with wide flower tubes, (e.g. *L. suffruticosum* in Figure 1B) allow placement of pollen from long-styled and short-styled flowers on different parts of the pollinator's body from species with narrow flower tubes (e.g. *L. narbonense,* Figure 1B). This should result in better movement of pollen between different morphs (12).

The studies on heterostylous flowers can help us to understand the meaning of other floral polymorphism or even animal polymorphisms. For example, snails species of *Amphidromus* present chiral dimorphism in which individuals present the shell dextrally or sinisterly coiled (13). Clearly, this variation can only be explained in the context of variation which increases mating between different phenotypes, just like Darwin predicted more than a hundred years ago.

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Memories are made of this . . .

Ventnor Botanic Garden plans to remember and celebrate its history as the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest. If you have a story to share about the hospital, whether you or a family member were a patient or a worker there, please contact me at rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com, marking your email Old Hospital. Or write to me at Rosalind Whistance, 11 Martine Close, Freshwater, PO40 9ND.

Please sir, pick me!

We asked for volunteers and in seconds **Joy Munro** had signed up to deliver an education strategy. At least that's how it felt . . .

My favourite era of history is the renaissance, 'the rebirth of learning' and I would like to think VBG is currently undergoing its own little renaissance. So forgive the 'reality TV' phrase, but after only six months as a volunteer and Friend of VBG I am about to describe 'The Education Journey'.

I don't know how it happened. One minute I was reading in the County Press that VBG was in need of volunteers and next it seems I was at the Volunteer Fair where I was talking to the loveliest of people, Rosemary Stewart and Jonyth Hill. I mentioned my background in education, and suddenly I was whisked over to Chris Kershaw and within moments I had agreed to write an education strategy!

I know so very little about VBG, I must be mad, I thought. But how difficult could it be to write an education strategy, when all through my teaching career I was required to write school policies . . . ?

And so the 'journey' started. There were many meetings with Chris Kershaw as we got our heads around a situation new to both of us. After a relatively short time and much research the strategy emerged with four key requirements, the final being: 'to provide precise detail of what we are going to deliver and how...'

Simple! Only problem, nothing in place. Then, that flash of inspiration, like a phoenix rising from our burnt out brains: to set up a self–guide programme for teachers. We would provide them with notes, activities and worksheets along with all the organisation requirements for an educational school visit. The objective? To encourage schools to visit the Garden. The education team quickly began the demanding task of preparing the programmes according to the new requirements of the National Curriculum.

However, this was not enough: it would only cater for schools. We had to consider education for beyond 16+. Now Chris Kershaw took on responsibility for higher education; he forged ahead communicating with Professor Scott Armbruster and Dr Rocio Borrales of the University of Portsmouth to propose a collaboration regarding Ecology, Evolution and VBG. This has already resulted in three excellent lectures and further collaboration between the university and VBG are proposed.

Further to that, we are in negotiation with Rob Mew and Celia Lowe from the Isle of Wight College about collaborative courses at VBG. Plus we welcome Claire Hudson, a medical herbalist who has agreed to hold a series of talks and workshops as well as to assist with the schools programme. [see *Ventnorensis* Autumn 2013]

Progress has been made, but the Education journey has really only just begun.

Joy Munro is the Friends' Education Representative for Schools and Families Resources and Teacher Funding Liaison.

The special event at the Garden to launch the programme for Schools' Education, was a great success. For details see: http://www.botanic.co.uk/pages/schools.htm

Our changing planet

Changes in the length of the growing season have been identified as a finger print of climate change, says **Dr. Matthew Tallis,** whose study of phenology, or 'Nature's calendar' reveals ways in which nature is adjusting to climate change.

As we move from the relative dormancy of winter and look forward to the onset of spring, the blooming and greening up of plants and another growing season, it is interesting to consider recent changes to the duration of the growing season.

The study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events and how these are influenced by seasonal and interannual variations in climate is termed phenology. In a more poetic sense phenology is commonly referred to as 'nature's calendar' www.naturescalendar.org.uk or 'the rhythm of the seasons'[1]. Changes in the timing of phenological events such as the beginning and end of the growing season have been identified as a 'finger-print' of climate change [2]. A European-wide analysis of 542 plant species report spring to be advancing an average of 2.5 days per decade and Autumn delaying by 1.3 days per decade since the 1970s [3]. In the UK

between 1950 – 2010 the onset of oak tree leafing in the spring in a Surrey woodland has advanced by nearly one month [4].

Observations collected between 1976 and 2005 have identified a mismatch in the start of spring phenology in the UK, with plant activities starting progressively earlier, then herbivores and carnivores showing least response to climatic warming and the timing of spring events [5]. If this trend persists, the mismatch could have consequences for the functioning and resilience of ecosystems. As a point of reference (1950s) these changes have happened in less than one human generation during which time global average temperature has increased by 0.6 °C and atmospheric carbon dioxide levels by 25 per cent. That considered, predictions for future temperatures are variable but, depending on the assumptions modelled, range between a global average increase of between 1.8 °C to 4.0 °C by 2100 [6]. Identifying both the drivers of changes in phenology and the consequences of such change is vital in predicting future climate impacts on ecosystems.

Surrey Woodland: Tree leafing has advanced by nearly a month since 1950

As expected there is a strong link between earlier spring events and warming, but the link between warming and changes in the timing of phonological events in the autumn is less strong [3]. My research has identified a link between increasing atmospheric CO_2 concentrations of ~45% and a slowing of leaf colour change and drop in the autumn (termed autumnal senescence) by approximately 10 days [7]. Carbon dioxide concentration influences plant growth and function directly through the process of photosynthesis. During this study I analysed the genetic response of poplar trees during the autumn in a nine hectare field with an artificially CO_2 enriched atmosphere (the EUROFACE experiment). Here elevated CO_2 produced a shift in plant metabolism towards production of defensive chemicals, such as anthocyanins, which offer protection to leaves and are likely to increase leaf persistence in the autumn, with the potential to delay the rate of autumnal senescence.

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[2] Parmesan C, Yohe G. 2003. Nature 421: 37–42.

[3] Menzel A, et al. 2006. Global Change Biology 12: 1–8.

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[5] Thackeray et al., 2010. Global Change Biology 16: 3304-3313

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Botany Club goes on an outing

In November, Botany Club members set out on their first outing like excited schoolchildren with a day off! Chris Kershaw had planned a packed day of education for us. We sailed over to Portsmouth and received an enthusiastic welcome from our friends at the School of Biological Sciences. Over cups of tea we heard from the Head, Dr Darren Menragh, that the department is hoping to inspire the scientists of the future with the 'Up For It Club' in local schools. Lecturer, Dr Matthew Tallis talked about Plants and the Environment, then their lively Spanish lecturer, Dr Rocio Peres-Barrales told us about Plants and their Interactions. Aiden Vey, a PhD student, explained his work with a fascinating group of plants called Dalechampia, then we battled our way through the students down to the greenhouses to see them. The lecturers are all very keen to bring their students over to our Garden to see the unique plants at Ventnor and study their arrangement in world areas.

Botany Club with the scientists at the School of Biological Studies

A quick walk to follow the Tree Trail in the nearby Victoria Park meant that we had time to enjoy the tiny Porter's Garden just inside the entrance to the Dockyard. This garden pre-dates the Battle of Trafalgar and provided useful medicinal herbs and vegetables for use on board ship. It is still lovingly tended by volunteers who try to create an example of what such an 18th century garden would have been like. A golden King William III presides over the far end and the entrance is guarded by Captain Scott.

A taxi took us from the Gosport Ferry for a relaxed lunch at the historic Anglesea Arms at Alverstoke before our visit nearby to the Regency Crescent Garden. This delightful ornamental garden was built in 1826 as part of a fashionable new Crescent area, including a bath house. Jane Austen's brother lived nearby. Sadly in 1949 it had become a wilderness but the

Borough Council obtained grants to revive it and in 1991, with the expertise of painter Wendy Osborne and members of the Friends, it was redesigned and they decided that no plants should be used that had not been in this country by 1850. Wendy showed us round enthusiastically, and was delighted to point out a thriving myrtle that was donated by VBG 23 years ago!

She gave us tea in her Crescent home and sent us on our way to the nearby Institute of Naval Medicine. Chris knew the Librarian, Jane Wickenden, at the James Lind Library housed within and we had been invited to look at the ancient medical artifacts and botanical tomes. Jane had laid out some wonderful old botany books which she had propped up on cushions. We were enchanted by the exquisite paintings and drawings of flowers; I particularly loved the big one which included moths, butterflies and caterpillars on their food plants.

In the James Lind Library

Learning about dalechampia with Aidan Vey

Painted hawk moth in North America 18th Century

The day finished with a visit to their fund raising Christmas Fair, complete with glass of hot punch and mince pies! An unforgettable day of botanical discoveries and new friends.

Rosemary Stewart

Photographs by Rosemary Stewart

New members

A very WARM WELCOME to these friends who have recently joined the Society.

Mr and Mrs Watson and Wesley ..... Lake
Lord and Lady Rootes ..... Bembridge
Mrs Lorna Llewellyn ..... Bembridge
Mrs Mary Burrows ..... Bembridge
Mr Jonathan Peel ..... Bembridge
Mr and Mrs Dale Fishburn ..... Bembridge
Mr and Mrs Peter Grimaldi ..... Bembridge
Mr Steven Gallop ..... Sandown
Mrs Sandra Adkins ..... Isle of Wight
Maj-General Martin and Mrs White ..... Seaview
Mr and Mrs Nicholas Azis ..... Bonchurch
Mr and Mrs Andrew Freeman ..... St Helens
Mr and Mrs John Ash ..... Shanklin
Mr and Mrs Norman Wakeling ..... Luccombe
Mr and Mrs Michael Smith ..... Guildford
Mrs H Higton ..... Ventnor
Mr C Odom ..... Isle of Wight
Mrs Jane Cooper ..... Shanklin

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh • Simon Goodenough • Brian Kidd

We have sown the seeds and we are growing a great new relationship with the Isle of Wight College!

The expertise of the Isle of Wight College is being shared with us, and we have great new plans to work together. Look out for our education courses in the coming season. The College has a major new building plan in place, where £6.5m has recently been granted for a new Science Technology Engineering and Maths block. As a Government funded Education establishment, the College has access to good resources, up to the minute trained staff and a background of support for everyone across the Island. We are delighted to be working together. Look out for the learning opportunities at VBG that might suit you!

Open Gardens 2014 **Opening up to support British Red Cross**

Ventnor Botanic Garden will be taking part in the 2014 Open Gardens scheme to help raise funds for the British Red Cross. From July 5th to 27th, VBG will offer a limited edition Trail Map exploring the heritage of the Garden and the former site of the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest. The Map will lead visitors around the Garden, stopping off at areas that remain from the days of the hospital, and the Herb and Medicinal Garden to learn about their uses in modern herbal medicine.

Design by Simone Dickens, Coco Design Co. Tel: 07530 867318 simone.whitehurst@googlemail.com

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

20 Recruits from Volunteer Fair

Directing talents: Friends meet and greet recruits

The Friends applied to Community Spaces for another grant to try and give a boost to volunteering at VBG and the whole Island. The Fair was arranged for 18th January and what a success it all was!

Altogether 21 different organisations filled the inside and outside of the Echium and Canna rooms and the alcove downstairs. They came with colourful stands and set up information tables: we even hosted a lifeboat in the car park! A centre spread in the County Press brought in the prospective volunteers and everybody was busy.

Our table was on the platform in *edulis* so we attracted the attention of those who came down for refreshment and to sample the tasty lunches provided by our new chef, Graham. We had a list of 20 recruits at the end of the day – new gardeners, tour guides, meet & greeters and those for the information kiosk. All the other groups had lots of interest and are really keen to come back next year, so are we are looking at another annual Island event?

We are always seeking more volunteers so if you are interested please get in touch with Luke Gunner, Volunteer Co-ordinator, 01983 855397 luke.gunner@botanic.co.uk or just come to the Garden and speak to the staff.

Rosemary Stewart

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